

Puget Sound Local Integration Task Force
Final Recommendations to the Puget Sound Partnership
To
Enhance Local Implementation of the Action Agenda
January 20, 2009

Task Force Background and Process

The Puget Sound Partnership's Action Agenda, adopted on December 1st, sets the course for achieving a healthy Puget Sound by 2020. Recognizing that local organizations are the cornerstone of Sound protection and restoration efforts, the Partnership, the Washington Department of Ecology, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, in collaboration with tribes, the Washington State Association of Counties, and the Association of Washington Cities, formed the Puget Sound Local Integration Task Force to recommend ways to enhance the capacity of local organizations to integrate their efforts and implement the Action Agenda.

This set of recommendations was developed by the Task Force over the course of three meetings in October and November, 2008. The Task Force also relied on insights and feedback provided at a public workshop held on November 6, 2008 and other public comments. Over 110 people attended the workshop to discuss the *Task Force Preliminary Ideas and Questions for Enhancing the Capacity of Local Groups to Implement the Action Agenda*.¹ Attendees came from all areas of Puget Sound and represented many of the diverse organizations working to protect and restore it, including tribes, cities, counties, federal and state governmental agencies, marine resource committees, regional fish enhancement groups, environmental and conservation organizations, conservation districts and WSU extension offices.

The next step in the process is for the three state agencies to consider the Task Force recommendations in consultation with the Tribes and City and County Associations and determine what actions are needed. These recommendations, if endorsed by the State, would require budget and policy actions by the Legislature for successful implementation.

The next two sections of this paper provide context for why local integration is needed and the following sections provide the Task Force recommendations for the scope of work, selection of integration groups and the support needed from state and federal agencies.

¹ Distributed on Oct. 31st, 2008.

Ensuring Accountability

As the Action Agenda is implemented, there is a need to ensure the efforts of the many agencies and groups working in the different parts of Puget Sound are driving collectively toward the goals outlined in the Action Agenda. To this end, the Governor and Legislature have specifically charged the Partnership with ensuring accountability: that agencies and organizations are carrying out their responsibilities, and that their actions are effective in protecting and restoring the health of Puget Sound. Experience from other large ecosystem management efforts demonstrates, and the Action Agenda itself notes, that leadership and accountability have been the missing ingredients in implementation. Success requires an effective interaction over time between “top down” direction and evaluation with “bottom up” implementation and interpretation of results within the framework state protection and restoration programs. Stormwater control, sanitary waste treatment , land use management, shoreline restoration, habitat protection through growth management and shorelines master programs – these and many other programs must be implemented consistently Soundwide and must form the backbone of the new focus on accountability and results.

While the Partnership recognizes that many recovery efforts are implemented in full or in part by local entities and that local participation will assist the Partnership’s accountability role, the Action Agenda recognizes that the Puget Sound effort has “....lacked an overall way to account for funds spent, actions taken, and progress achieved at the ecosystem scale.... [and that what is needed is]....a system where goals, outcomes, indicators and benchmarks are linked to strategies and actions.” (page 71, question 3). The Action Agenda also notes that “We will need to clarify the role of the Partnership and its relationship to local coordinating groups and implementers, striking a balance between the need for leadership and accountability with the essential value of partnership, broad participation, and local engagement.” (page 72, question 3).

There is also a need to further develop the specifics of how the goals of the Action Agenda will translate into on-the-ground actions in each sub-area (Action Area or other geographic delineation) of Puget Sound. For example, the Action Agenda calls for protecting the habitats and habitat forming processes that are still intact, but it does not specify where these are and how best to protect them. Through an iterative process involving the Partnership, other state agencies and local organizations, the detailed actions can be defined and then carried out in a transparent and measurable manner.

Harnessing the power and efforts of all the local organizations working on issues like protection requires coordination between them that does not exist now in the comprehensive manner needed. A local structure and process that facilitates the integration of the efforts of all groups in each sub-area of Puget Sound will facilitate meeting these needs efficiently and effectively. Integration means there is a system and process where the efforts of many are woven together to achieve a common result for their part of the Puget Sound ecosystem; where all implementers are performing their appropriate part to achieve a common set of priorities, actions are being tracked, evaluated and there is a feedback loop highlighting where there is success and where the results are coming up short. If efforts are not successful and changes are necessary, it is important that issues are identified early and acted on by the group with

responsibility to make the change. This local integration is best achieved through a local structure and process that complements the overall efforts of the Partnership and augments their actions to achieve accountability.

Integrated Implementation of the Action Agenda

Increasing accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency Sound wide and at the local scale is a natural next step in the evolution of efforts to protect and restore the Sound. Over the last several decades considerable investments have been made in a multitude of groups that contribute to restoration, protection, and pollution prevention efforts. State and local governments have supported creation of organizations to set priorities and implement actions. These organizations include early players like the Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups and Conservation Districts, to the more recent salmon watershed councils, marine resource committees, and beach watchers to name just a few. In each Action Area the number of involved groups ranges from twenty to over a hundred. This multitude of groups dedicated to restoring the Sound is one of the great strengths of ongoing recovery efforts but also can be confusing in determining who is responsible for specific actions and results.

The creation of the Partnership and the Action Agenda provides a catalyst to harness these efforts and create the overarching structure and direction for integrating efforts and ensuring public and private funds are well spent. The next step is to build on the working relationships that have been established through the watershed's salmon recovery, stormwater control and water quality and quantity work, as well as the work of the Northwest Straits Commission, marine resource committees, and many environmental and conservation organizations. The existing relationships between local governments for growth management and transportation are essential to build on as well.

To this end, the Task Force recommends that the Partnership foster a local process in each subregion of the Sound to assist in achieving accountability. Above all else, such a process requires a clear designation of which group will take the lead in bringing together all in their area and collectively harnessing the power of the many involved in protecting and restoring the Sound. These "integrating organizations" would ensure implementation of the actions that will have the greatest impact on achieving the Partnership's strategic priorities: protecting and restoring ecosystem processes, and reducing sources of water pollution. They would assist the Partnership with ensuring local priorities are consistent with the Action Agenda, tracking actions, and assessing results in a manner that rolls up to a Sound wide picture and recommending changes in local strategies when necessary. They would work in concert with the Ecosystem Coordinating Board and the Leadership Council. The following recommendations provide a set of criteria and process to select the integration organizations in each area, and those elements of state and federal support that will be needed to ensure their ability to successfully coordinate efforts and achieve efficiencies.

Scope of Work for Integrating Organizations at the Local Level

Geography, population demographics, environmental conditions and political structures vary greatly across Puget Sound. As a result, any local structure designed to promote integration must have the

flexibility to build on existing local processes for integrating implementation, assessing results, and recommending how responsibilities will be carried out. The Partnership should allow each area of the Sound the flexibility to take the next step in the evolution of integrating local efforts in a way that accounts for local differences. It is possible that these structures will need to look quite different in order to maximize the effectiveness of recovery efforts. This may mean having one integrating organization in certain areas, while other areas might require multiple groups that work together.

In some cases there is already a logical group to perform the role of integration in an Action Area, as in the case of the Hood Canal Coordinating Council. In many areas it may be best to tap several watershed groups that can work together to roll up results to the Action Area geography. In other cases, like the North Olympic Peninsula, it may be necessary to create a new structure for all existing groups to work within. By initiating this approach the Partnership would stimulate a clear structure and process in each area that maximizes the effectiveness and increases the efficiency of local efforts.

Below is the Task Force's recommended scope of work to accomplish this outcome and to create Integrating Organizations at the Action Area scale.

- 1. Build on Existing Groups and Foster Collaboration:** Building on the capacity of existing efforts and the relationships between groups will produce quicker and more efficient coordination for implementing the Action Agenda. Integrating organizations should support existing groups to carry out their roles in protecting and restoring the local ecosystem in ways that are consistent with the Sound-wide effort. An integrating organization should help clarify and not diminish the importance or role of existing implementation groups. They should provide a forum to assist them in being more effective and efficient. A primary goal of the integrating organization should be to work with existing groups to accelerate actions and not hinder current efforts consistent with the Action Agenda. They should encourage governmental as well as non-government groups including local businesses, and increase opportunities for the public to get involved.
- 2. Integrate Local Efforts to Protect and Restore Ecosystem Processes and Reduce Sources of Water Pollution:** The Action Agenda identifies three main priorities for Sound health. These are ecosystem protection and restoration and water pollution control. Each of these priorities are impacted by different regulations, require work from different local groups, and face very different threats. While recognizing that state law governs many aspects of water quality and habitat protection, certain areas of the Sound may require separate groups to coordinate the 3 priority areas of protection, restoration, and water pollution control with optimal effectiveness, while other areas may require only one. Where multiple groups are found to be more effective, a structure should be established to ensure integration across the three areas in order to maximize efficiency. Each local area should have the flexibility to establish the specifics of this integrating structure in such a way that is most efficient given the local conditions. For instance, one possible solution would be to have overlap in group membership where there is a need to have multiple groups in a local area.

3. **Ensure Science is Integral:** In performing the function of integration, the local organization must demonstrate how science is used to inform key decisions related to tracking actions, assessing results and developing new strategies where necessary. The Partnership's Science Panel should have an oversight role to ensure the science used at the local level is current and peer-reviewed.
4. **Encourage Diverse Leadership:** It is critical to have local decision makers, including county, city and tribal officials, as well as nongovernmental leaders, participating in the local integrating organizations. Elected officials in particular are often the most knowledgeable of overall community needs, are responsible for implementing many of the relevant actions, and are accountable to the local public. Involving these officials also increases efficiency, as their knowledge of other community efforts can help avoid duplication and overlap. State and federal representatives should also participate in these local integrating groups to ensure effective communication and coordination between local, state, and federal efforts. It is essential to have non-governmental members to ensure integration is not too government-centric, and to foster trust, transparency and participation in the process. Also, businesses, nonprofit organizations and community groups bring important perspectives on efficiency and accountability. Overall, the composition of the local integrating organization forms the foundation for a strong collaboration necessary to create a grassroots-ownership for action and results.
5. **Assure Objectivity, Transparency and Inclusiveness in Assessing Results:** Protection, restoration, and water quality actions can be controversial and politically charged. As a result, it is important to make sure that any local assessment of results is carried out using scientific methods, has some degree of independence from the implementing organizations, and is done in a manner transparent to the public. The process must promote an inclusive environment that provides opportunities for the involvement of any interested parties. These assessments should also be carried out in a manner that seeks to assist and improve the effectiveness of the implementing and wherever possible increase the commitment of those being evaluated to contribute towards a healthy Puget Sound. In addition, involving citizens as volunteers to help with the collection of the data used in the assessment of results can have many benefits, and should be considered where appropriate.
6. **Conduct Annual or Biennial Reviews:** Local integrating organizations should bring together all implementing organizations on an annual or biennial basis to ensure ongoing efficiency and effectiveness in meeting stated goals. In addition, a public forum should be established in conjunction with the Partnership where local, state and federal and non-governmental organizations would participate in assessing results and developing necessary course changes.

Process for Selecting the Local Integrating Organization(s)

Task Force members and workshop participants mentioned a number of groups that could meet the criteria above and have the local support needed to inclusively integrate, track actions, assess results,

and recommend changes to strategies. However, the Task Force recommends that additional work be done in each subarea to identify an appropriate integrating group or groups. Below is the Task Force's recommendation for a process that can be used to identify the integrating structure in each area.

- 1. Establish and clarify roles, responsibilities, and support:** Before any group is selected by local organizations and the Partnership, the Partnership should clearly delineate the scope of work for integrating organizations as well as the criteria and process for selecting them. The Partnership should clearly lay out the goals that the group will be expected to help achieve, the group's roles and responsibilities in achieving those goals, and how the group will be held accountable for achieving them. The Partnership must identify what financial and other support the group should expect to receive and who is accountable for providing the identified resources. In the selection process, the Partnership should be as inclusive as possible and involve local organizations that are implementing the Action Agenda. As part of this work, the Partnership should provide clear and specific definitions of key terms.
- 2. Local groups need to work together to determine the structure/organization for integration in their area:** Based on the roles, responsibilities, and support outlined by the Partnership, local implementation groups should meet and agree upon the specific organization that they trust will foster collaboration and integration of their efforts. The local groups should be clear about how the integrating organization will help them meet the Partnership's protection, restoration, and pollution prevention goals in a way that maximizes effectiveness, increases efficiency and ensures adequate assessment of outcomes. The resulting structure may vary significantly from area to area. In some parts of the Sound, it may consist of assigning one group for the three priority areas. In other areas, it may result in a different group coordinating each priority area, with that work being rolled up to ensure efficient efforts across the three priority areas. These differences should be supported and encouraged where they contribute to a more effective structure for achieving the Action Agenda's goals.
- 3. Partnership Contracts with Each Integrating Organization**

Once a local group has been identified to perform the integration role, the Partnership should ensure that the group can perform the functions consistent with the recommended criteria. The Partnership should conduct periodic reviews to make sure the group is successful and to provide opportunities for others to raise issues if they think the group is not meeting the criteria for success.

State and Federal Support

Successful integration at the local scale requires strong and consistent support from the state and federal governments. This support includes:

- 1. Set Clear Goals, Outcomes, and Strategies:** There must be clear, consistent direction from state and federal agencies. The Partnership, through the Action Agenda, needs to set the goals,

outcomes and strategies necessary to achieve a healthy Puget Sound, and ensure they are of sufficient clarity that local organizations can identify and implement those actions on the ground.

2. **Ensure Accountability:** In addition to setting clear and specific goals, as the agency ultimately responsible for the successful implementation of the Action Agenda, the Partnership needs to help ensure that local efforts are contributing towards reaching those goals. A structure needs to be established wherein the Partnership can help identify when local efforts are not meeting desired goals and can work collaboratively with the relevant integrating group(s) to get the efforts back on track. The Partnership must also ensure that the state and federal governments are meeting their responsibilities to facilitate success at the local level as well as for the whole Sound.
3. **Provide Adequate, Dedicated, and Integrated Funding:** On-going, dedicated funding is necessary at levels equal to the magnitude of effort needed for monitoring, protection, restoration and pollution reduction. Achieving the state's goals will require both additional funding, and a more integrated approach to distributing that funding. Additional funding to integrating groups will be necessary.

Integrated funding will be critical as the current system of multiple state grant programs, each addressing a different, specialized aspect of the Sound's health, creates large administrative burdens for local groups and complicates the development and implementation of ecosystem-based projects. A significant change to the current approach would be to have state and federal agencies work together to provide the appropriate mix of funding sources for local projects, rather than forcing this responsibility on each project sponsor. Now that the Action Agenda sets the course for the necessary actions, it should be possible for each area's integrating organization to propose an annual suite of projects and actions that need funding, and for state and federal agencies to provide the amount and sources of funding to match the projects. This would dramatically reduce the administrative work for project sponsors and increase their capacity to do more work.

The Partnership should also consider how the 12 county regional financing entity recommended in the Action Agenda could foster the work of the local integration organizations.

4. **Coordinate Monitoring and Data Management:** Agreement on what data to collect and how it will be managed is critical to overall coordination, tracking of actions, and assessment of results. The data management system must provide consistent protocols, allow for the collection of data by multiple groups, and encourage citizens to take part. The Partnership needs to complete a Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan. It is essential that local organizations only have one state system to contribute their data into. Once the system is up and operating, the Partnership should provide the initial data assessment as well as support the participation of local integrating organizations in data analysis and interpretation of results. The monitoring

consortium should provide leadership in creating the data management system and the process for interpreting results.

5. **Support Learning and Innovation:** While a great deal is known about what is needed in order to protect and restore the Sound, there is a need both to improve our understanding of what actions will produce the best results and to more effectively share knowledge that state and local groups already possess. To that end, it is important that there be a structure and process to support sharing and learning at the local scale. “Centers of Excellence” is a concept where the expertise and innovation of multiple organizations is supported and then shared across the Sound. This concept has received widespread support from the Task Force and from workshop attendees. State and federal government should support this approach by setting up a coordinating structure of learning and innovation and providing sufficient financial support.
6. **Create an Overarching Education Strategy and Key Messages:** Local groups recognize the great importance of education for citizens, decision makers and staff of implementing organizations. There is strong support for the Partnership’s commitment, through the Education, Communication and Outreach (ECO) Network, to create the “big picture” principles, strategies, common messages and funding for education in such a way that allows for tailoring and implementation by local organizations.
7. **Facilitate Collaboration and Solutions on Sound wide Issues:** Some activities identified in the Action Agenda affect local implementers across the Sound. The integrating organizations under this set of recommendations would be responsible within their area. They will need the assistance of the Partnership to facilitate project planning and implementation across action areas to implement these activities.

Conclusions and Next Steps

With this final report the Task Force has completed its assignment. The Partnership, Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife should consider how best to address these recommendations through implementation of the Action Agenda as well as policy and budget decisions by the State Legislature and Congress. Task Force members are available and welcome the opportunity to provide additional information and insights to Partnership staff, the Ecosystem Coordination Board, and the Leadership Council.

Overall, the Task Force members believe that a strong relationship between the state and federal governments and local groups is essential for restoring Puget Sound. Key ingredients for success by the Partnership include: defining clear goals, strategies and outcomes combined with local ingenuity for implementation.

Task Force Members

The following individuals served on the Task Force:

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